

*Statement by Harold Robinson, UNFPA Representative at
Caribbean Media Awards 2005, Hilton hotel
December 6, 2005*

**Madam Chair Fae Ellington
Professors Joycelin Massiah and Barry Chevannes
Ms. Wendy Fitzwilliam, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador
My Colleagues and Partners**

UNFPA bids you a warm welcome to the 2005 Caribbean Media Awards for reporting on Population and Development. This is an event of which we are extremely proud. Each year we are encouraged by the responses we get from our media partners to our invitation to submit their works on the issues that are of concern to us. These include HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, the Millennium Development Goals and of course Gender Equality, which is this year's focus.

The objective of the Caribbean Media Awards is to encourage and promote leadership and excellence in Caribbean media practitioners/journalists in covering these issues that are so vital to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

We believe wholeheartedly that the key to satisfying the poverty reduction goals agreed to at the 2000 Millennium Summit and reaffirmed at the World Summit in New York in September lies in

ensuring Gender equality. When we speak of gender equality we envision societies in which, healthy men and women work together hand in hand as equals. We see societies in which, both men and women are given the same choices, opportunities and means to fulfill their expectations in life. In such societies there is no room for discrimination of any kind.

When we consider that worldwide one in three women has been beaten, coerced into unwanted sex relations or abused, often by a family member or an acquaintance and that gender based violence kills and harms as many women and girls between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer, we see that we are a far way off from realizing this dream.

When we consider as well that 76 million unintended pregnancies occur annually in the developing world alone and over 19 million maternal deaths result from unsafe abortions, we see that in terms of Reproductive health we are far off the mark. The fact is that too many women and girls do not enjoy reproductive rights, which are basic human rights and include the right to freely and responsibly determine the number, timing and spacing of their children; neither do they have the means nor enjoy the right to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.

As a result, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Today, approximately half of the estimated 40 million people living with HIV are women, with the greatest increase occurring in young people between the age of 15 and 24. Here in the Caribbean 49% of the people living with HIV are women and three quarters of the new HIV infections are transmitted between men and women-many from husband to wife.

We understand that it will not be an easy task to get to this point of equality because there are deeply entrenched cultural, religious and societal beliefs that support and keep in place gender inequalities. To overcome these challenges we need all stakeholders on board including boys and men. Here I must make the point that it is critically important that we engage men and boys in the process of achieving gender equality for all. This must start in the home with the way we raise our children and our boys in particular. Fathers we need to be positive role models for our sons and the young boys who fall within our sphere of influence. We need to lead the way in challenging those traditional ideas into which we have been socialized about household roles and childrearing. It is a fact that worldwide, fathers contribute far less time to direct childcare than mothers but there are those men who are actively involved in caring for their children who do not consider taking care of their

children as “helping out’ but as a responsibility. We encourage our media partners to seek out more of those stories and present them so that we can begin to change these negative gender attitudes and relieve our women of the harmful effects of gender inequities.

Other stakeholders that we need on board in the march toward equality include government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Faith Based Organizations, community groups and importantly, the media. So today, we pay tribute to six journalists from three of the 21 Caribbean countries that this office represents: Sharda Ganga from Suriname, Cedriann Martin from Trinidad and Tobago, Carol Francis, Damion Mitchell, Sonja Simms and Eulalee Thompson from Jamaica. We salute you for the role that you and your colleagues are playing in encouraging a better understanding of the issues. For there can be no question about the benefits of gender equality, they include a higher quality of life for individual women and girls, but also stronger families, communities and countries.

Welcome once again and we hope you’ll have a wonderful evening.

Thank you,